

13 CHARTER SCHOOLS LOSE CMU'S SUPPORT

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Body

Central Michigan University's Board of Trustees on Friday is expected to rescind the charters it gave 13 public schools to make room for other K-12 schools that may have a better shot at success.

University officials call it a house-cleaning. Six of the 13 schools have received or likely will receive charters elsewhere. The rest have never gotten off the ground, university officials said.

"When they got into locating a facility, or fire marshal approval, or start-up costs, they ran into barriers," Robert Mills, director of charter schools for CMU, said Wednesday.

At least five of the schools were to open in the Detroit area.

All of the schools were chartered in 1995 -- the first year the independently run public schools were allowed by the Legislature -- and were contingent on their backers finding start-up money and buildings and meeting other criteria, Mills said.

CMU has nine new charter applicants that are better prepared and probably more viable than earlier ones, Mills said.

Trustees will consider approving up to five of those schools Friday.

Money, especially, can be a problem for anyone trying to launch a charter school. State per-pupil funding does not arrive until October of the school's first year. Mills said charter schools need at least \$250,000 plus a building to open their doors.

CMU can issue no more than 50 charters. By dropping the 13 schools, CMU will have 45 active charter schools, 39 of which have opened. As of September, 74 charter schools were operating in Michigan.

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One of the CMU charters to be rescinded belongs to North Star Academy, a school in Southfield specializing in learning disabilities and attention disorders. North Star, which opened last year, has 25 pupils and maintains an 8-to-1 pupil-teacher ratio. Tuition is \$11,000 per year.

"They said we were too small," Kendra Tobes, executive director, said Wednesday. "We have to keep the program small with our reduced teacher ratio because our students need to have their program individualized."

On the other hand, Bay-Arenac Community High School in Essexville, an alternative high school in the Bay City suburb, was happy to sever its relationship with CMU.

The school is now chartered through the Bay-Arenac Intermediate School District. "We changed our mind about going with them," director Shelley Kennedy said of CMU.

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